

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000473

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/R/MR, I/RW, I/REC; PA  
SA/INS (FOR JWALLER); SA/PD LJIRWIN, LSCENSNY, WREINCKENS;  
SSA/PAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: IRAQ

1. Independent English daily wonders whether "war on Iraq [will] free US from terrorists threat."

Under the headline "Will war on Iraq free US from terrorists threat?", the ISLAND (opposition English daily, islandwide circulation) wrote on 3/21:

The question arises whether elimination of the Saddam Hussein regime will rid America and European nations from the threat of terrorism. The war in Afghanistan and driving out the Taleban regime, have not eliminated the Al Queda and its leader bin Laden. Even US intelligence agencies such as the CIA and FBI have said openly that America will not be free of terrorist attacks. Much progress has been made in the Global War on Terrorism and President Bush has been receiving a good response to his appeal from most countries, including many Islamic states. But it is evident that that he is jeopardising his global effort on terrorism with this war which has proven to be much unpopular.

2. Government-owned English daily ponders local fallout, praises government's preparations.

Under the headline "Tiding over emergencies," the DAILY NEWS (government-owned English daily, islandwide circulation) wrote on 3/21:

With tensions further intensifying in the Gulf, many a Lankan heart is going out to the numerous local migrant workers in the Middle East who would now have to grapple with a whole host of imponderables. Apparently, not many Lankans are employed in Iraq itself but a considerable number of them are employed in Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring countries which could be expected to be affected by a war in the Gulf. Their safety should be a prime concern for the State and for the people of this country.

Fortunately, the Government has taken cognizance of this requirement. ... every possible step has been taken to evacuate some 500,000 Lankan expatriate workers in the Middle East, to "safe areas" with the help of Lankan missions in the region....

Besides the provision of these facilities and security measures, evacuation plans should also be envisaged for these workers in the event of the war having grave spillover effects. It would be best for the State to be prepared for serious humanitarian crises although we hope fervently that there would be no prolonged suffering for anyone.

Food shortages need to be anticipated and the necessary measures taken to ensure that essential commodities are stocked and rationed, if necessary. We hope the new regulations would ensure the fulfilment of these conditions and provide for the efficient running of local food supply systems.

There is every possibility of unscrupulous traders cashing-in on situations of this kind to ensure self-enrichment. Times of hardship invariably turn out to be opportunities for hoarding and for earning a fast buck by the more parasitic of businessmen. It is up to the authorities to guard against such dangers.

3. Independent Sinhala daily says that Saddam's imprudence in 1990 is being matched by American imprudence today.

Under the headline "Now showing!" DIVAINA (opposition Sinhala daily) wrote on 3/21:

The hi tech war movie on worldwide TV channels. This is about a war initiated by a undisciplined and stubborn war-loving man to manipulate another of the same ilk.

George W. has planned this war for a long time and Saddam looks happy to receive it.

Using the same bull-in-a-China-shop approached that it

followed in Vietnam decades ago, and in Afghanistan a year ago, the US is putting the whole world in grave danger.... And Saddam is ready.... For each missile that Bush sends, Saddam will reply with a missile of smallpox, yellow fever, etc. We have constantly been aware of this and have often expressed our views....

We have absolutely no regard for Saddam, who is a bloody dictator who controls millions of people in Iraq. But if Bush is using this situation to take control of Iraq's oil reserves, or to realize some other hidden objective, we condemn that, too

One must be wise enough to understand the limits of one's freedom. Saddam didn't show prudence in 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait. George B. isn't showing it today.

14. Independent Sinhala daily suggests "Let's be prepare for the impact of the war."

Under the headline "Let's be prepared for the impact of war" LANKADEEPA (independent Sinhala daily) wrote on 3/21: No one can say how and when the war will be over, but one thing is clear: billions of people -- in Iraq and other developing countries -- will face numerous difficulties. To this the Sri Lankan government should give priority. It is urgent and vital.

Ministers of Labor and of Consumer affairs have spoken of migrant workers and consumer items and food and petroleum. But consistent attention is vital, as almost everything in our country loses its fizz after some time.

Hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans work in the Middle East. They earn vital foreign exchange for us. If that is hampered, we will lose the forex and, also, unemployment in the country will increase significantly....

Who can assure harmony in foreign employment, forex, fuel prices, food supply? ... a short-term program is urgently needed; the government should start something ASAP!

Wills